

VZCZCXRO7614
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHNC #0135/01 0510747
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 200747Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9645
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5391
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1180

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 000135

SIPDIS

H FOR SENATOR DURBIN'S OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/19/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CY](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL DURBIN DISCUSSES CYPRUS SOLUTION

Classified By: AMB F URBANCIC FOR REASONS 1.5 (B AND D)

¶1. (C) During February 15-17, Senator Richard Durbin led a Codel of six persons to Cyprus to discuss progress towards a solution to the island's division. In their meetings with Greek Cypriot leaders, including President Christofias, Chief Negotiator Iacovou, Foreign Minister Kyprianou, and Opposition leader Anastasiades, two points were repeatedly made to the Codel:

- The obstacle to a solution is Turkey and especially the Turkish military. They prevent the Turkish Cypriots from making the concessions necessary to arrive at negotiated settlement. As Christofias told the Senator, "the Turkish military creates problems for Talat; he's not free to negotiate."

- The only role the United States can usefully play to generate progress in the talks is to utilize its good relationship with Turkey, and especially its ties to the Turkish military, to convince them that continued Turkish military occupation of Cyprus is unacceptable and will prevent Turkey's accession to the EU, therefore they should end the limits they impose on the Turkish Cypriot's ability to negotiate.

¶2. (C) During the Codel's meetings with Turkish Cypriot "president" Talat and Chief Negotiator Nami, the Senator asked whether they were constrained in the talks by Turkish pressure. Both acknowledged that northern Cyprus is highly dependent on Turkey due to the "isolation" imposed by the ROC. "We can't make an international phone call unless it goes through Turkey. You can't send me a postcard unless it has an address in Turkey" said Nami. Talat acknowledged that if Turkey insisted that the talks end, he would have no choice but to do so given the "TRNC's" economic and security reliance on its large neighbor and key donor. However, both also insisted that Turkey is giving them all the room they need to negotiate, and that GC insistence that the negotiations are slow because of Turkish pressure on Talat is, simply wrong: "when I say no to Christofias, it's because I say no" Talat told the Senator with some emotion.

¶3. (C) Interlocutors from both communities agreed that the two leaders are sincerely pro-solution and offer an historic opportunity for progress given their similar left-wing background and years of cooperation when they were both party leaders. Illustrating this point, GC Chief Negotiator Iacovou told the Codel that in order to improve Talat's CTP Party's chances in April 18 parliamentary elections, the two leaders would drop the current discussions of property issues due to their difficulty and contentiousness, and move on to economic governance; an area in which considerable steps forward can be announced. Also, Iacovou said that a joint business event is being planned in advance of the TC elections to further highlight "progress" in the talks.

¶4. (C) UN Special Representative Downer told the Codel that the odds of an agreement this year are "50/50." He emphasized

that US and UK influence on events on Cyprus "should not be exaggerated" and that what would be most helpful to him would be for the US to continue to play a quiet supportive role behind the scenes and to "keep Ankara's feet to the fire." He strongly opposed the idea of a US Special Representative to Cyprus, arguing that it would be a distraction to the negotiators and potentially diminish his own influence.

15. (C) Comment: The consensus on both sides is that a conclusion to the talks is possible this year, in advance of the EU's report on Turkey's progress towards accession, but that it will take considerable good will from the other side and increased momentum/frequency of the talks to realize this timetable. The fact that considerable pressure was applied in Washington by Cyprus Ambassador Kakkouris and in Nicosia by Vice Foreign Minister Emiliou for Durbin not to meet with Talat does not bode well for such good will, although the visit with Talat had no negative effect on Durbin's meetings on the GC side. The Senator and Illinois State Treasurer, Alexi Giannoulias, who accompanied the Codel, stressed that the US understands that any solution must be reached by and between Cypriots, but that the US stands ready to provide any assistance requested. They also stressed the urgency of the matter and strongly encouraged all sides to not let this historic opportunity slip away. The fact that the delegation has close personal ties with President Obama ensured that the Codel's message was heard, even if virtually all Cypriots continue to believe that the onus for progress continues to rest with the other side.

16. (U) Codel Durbin did not have an opportunity to clear this message before departing.

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